

# Menstruation (or periods to you & me!)

I didn't start mine until I was 16 and just remember thinking there was something seriously wrong with me because I felt it was super late.

**Sarah Alexander, @WonderlandBlogs**

I had been withdrawn from a sex ed session at school because of seeing a Speech and language therapist so missed the lesson about periods. I was ok with my first period because my mum had told me what it was but was petrified with my second period as I didn't understand that you had them monthly - I thought something was wrong! I was only 9.

**Claire Holland, @EnhancetheUK**



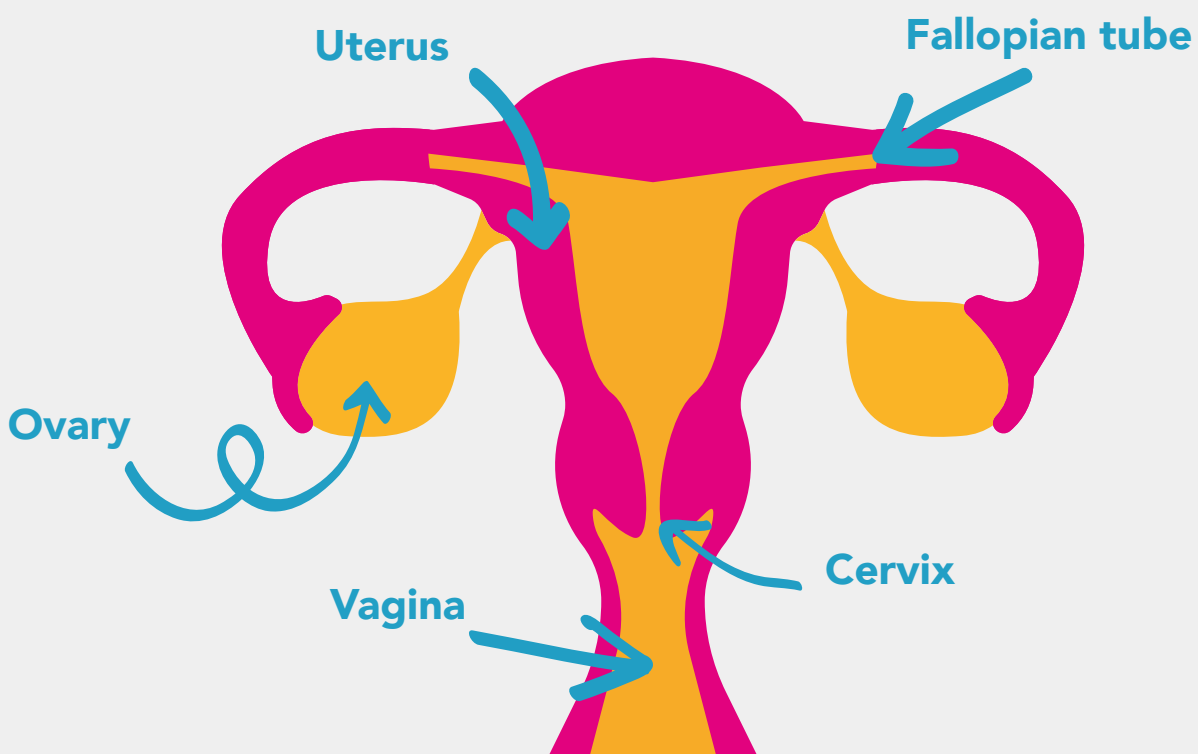
I remember being 13 and one of the last to start so desperately wanted to catch up. Started at swimming lessons and didn't know what to say so carried on and hoped for the best. Remember being so happy that I was now officially a grown up. Then the second one came and this time it was a proper one and remember calling my mum at work saying all the water was red and that it made me feel faint. Never imagined it would be lots of blood like that!

**Zoe Lloyd, @EnhancetheUK**

Disabled or not, menstruation (an extremely difficult word to pronounce that basically means periods) will come to most of us. The age you start and how long the periods last can differ, but there's plenty of information out there to tell you everything you need to know.

## All about periods

Periods can last between 3 and 7 days, and happen monthly, when your body needs to get rid of the lining of the womb in order for a fresh lining to develop.



- Each woman has a 'menstrual cycle' – the time from the first day of one period to the first day of your next period. When you first start bleeding, these cycles can be unreliable, and the number of days in them can change, but this often stabilises as time goes on. Cycles can be anything from 21 days to 45 days, depending on your age and how long you've been getting periods. The good thing about the cycles, though, is once stabilised, they can help you become in tune with your body, so much so that you may be able to tell when you're going to have a mood swing, period pains or feel loved up!
- The average age for a girl to get her period is 12, although periods can start between the ages of 8 and 16. If your period hasn't started by the age of 16, it's recommended you pop in to see your doctor.
- Periods can be light, medium or heavy. This is called the menstrual flow, and the amount of blood you lose can make you feel faint. If you're struggling with the flow of your period, or it is causing you pain, medication is available. Have a chat with your GP.
- Women usually have periods until menopause. Menopause occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, usually around age 50. Menopause means that a woman is no longer ovulating (producing eggs) or having periods and can no longer get pregnant. Like menstruation, menopause can vary from woman to woman and these changes may occur over several years.



## Pads or Tampons?

One of the most embarrassing things girls often find about periods, is that there is a chance of the blood leaking through your clothes if you don't wear the right sanitary towels or tampons. Don't worry! There are so many options out there that you are sure to find the best option for you.

### Sanitary Towels (or Pads)

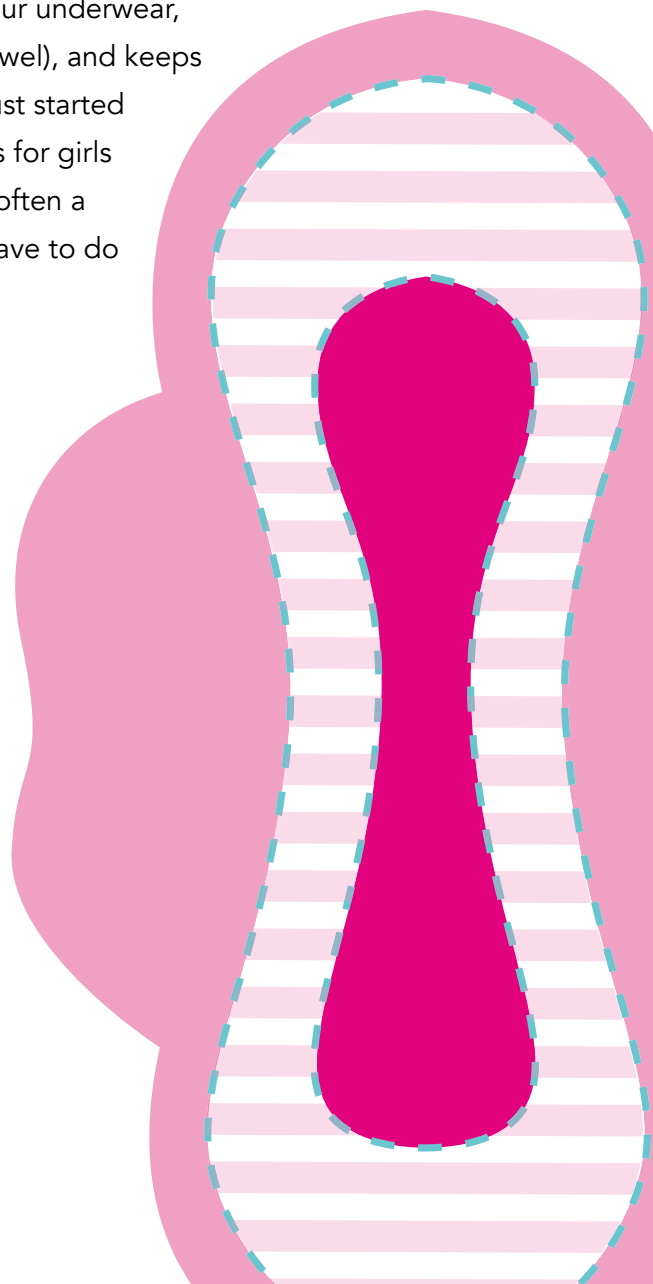
Pads, like periods, come in all sorts of sizes so that you can choose the right one for the flow of your period. By sticking them to the inside of your underwear, the pads then absorb the blood that leaves your body (like a towel), and keeps you dry and leak free! There are panty liners, for when you've just started and your periods are very light, and there's also night time pads for girls with really heavy periods. And everything inbetween! Pads are often a good way to start when you begin your periods, as you don't have to do anything other than stick them onto your knickers!

Pads can sometimes leak if your flow is really heavy, so make sure to change them regularly

If you're planning on going swimming pads won't work so you'll need to try a tampon

Choose unscented pads & tampons, as perfumes can irritate the sensitive skin of your vulva...

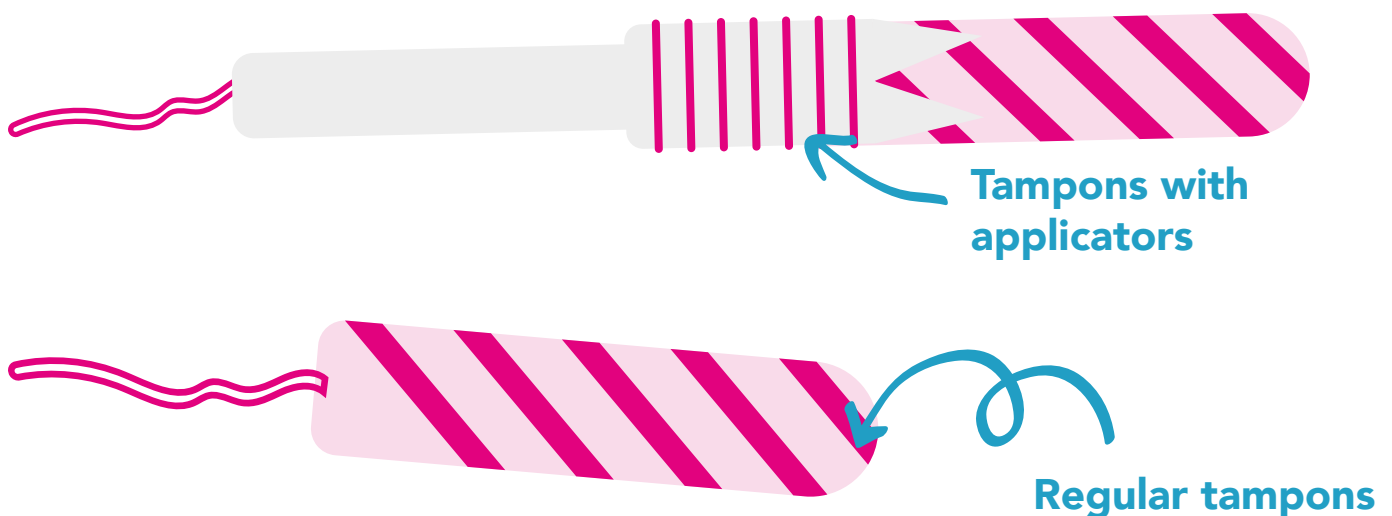
Delivered



## Tampons

Tampons work to absorb blood, just like pads, but they do this from the inside of your body, and are pushed into your vagina to effectively 'block' any blood from leaving the body. Tampons can either come with applicators (plastic tubes you push together to help get the tampon into position), or you can just push the tampon up with your finger. Like pads, tampons come prepared for light, regular and super heavy periods, and there are many different brands you can buy.

Because they are pushed inside you, tampons can be difficult to use for girls who have just started their periods, as the vaginal muscles are tight. It's very important that these are relaxed before inserting a tampon so keep calm. It shouldn't be a painful experience!



## Whether you choose pads or tampons...

Remember to change them every 4 to 8 hours to ensure that they don't leak and, most importantly, that your body stays healthy. If you use tampons, you are at risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome, or TSS. TSS is a rare but sometimes deadly disease. TSS is caused by bacteria that can produce toxins. If your body can't fight the toxins, your immune (body defence) system reacts and causes the symptoms of TSS:

- Sudden high fever
- Muscle aches
- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- fainting
- Rashes
- Sore Throat
- Bloodshot eyes.

It's not something to worry about, but definitely something to be aware of.

**If you have a disability:** Think about whether pads or tampons will be the best method for you. If you have limited dexterity in your hands, it might be easier to simply stick the pads onto your underwear than inserting a tampon. Alternatively, if you are a wheelchair user and sitting down a lot, pads might be unreliable and leak, so tampons might be for you!

## Extra support

Feel free to contact Mik or Emily at The Love Lounge:

[www.enhancetheuk.org/enhance/the-love-lounge](http://www.enhancetheuk.org/enhance/the-love-lounge)

These guides are part of Enhance the UK's **#UndressingDisability** campaign: Sex Ed for Teenagers. Show your support by following us on Twitter and Instagram! **@EnhancetheUK**

